Farmington Historic Plantation Designation Report

Louisville Metro Historic Landmarks
and
Preservation Districts Commission

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Farmington Historic Plantation Local Landmark Designation Report
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Location

Farmington is located at 3033 Bardstown Road in the Highlands area of Louisville. The property is currently comprised of six buildings on 14 acres of land. It is bordered on the north and east by the City of Wellington on the west by Sullivan University and on the south by the Watterson Expressway. The entrance to the property is located off of Bardstown Road, north of Sullivan University.

Description

(The following information was provided by the Historic Homes Foundation and Farmington.)

Farmington was established as a hemp plantation that grew to 554 acres. Construction on the house, much of it undoubtedly by slaves, began in 1815 and was completed by 1816. It was built for John (1772-1840) and Lucy Fry Speed (1788-1874). The Speed family owned the property until 1865.

Farmington is a Federal style brick house of fourteen rooms designed by Paul Skidmore. The house is one story with a basement that is about six feet above the ground. As a result of this, the basement was used as living space. The front entrance is a half recessed portico with Roman Doric columns.

In recent years, Farmington has been restored to its 1830s look and offers visitors a glimpse into nineteenth century antebellum life. Both the interior and exterior have been repainted, restoring the building to its original bright blue, yellow, and pink colors. The exterior colors were determined by paint analysis. The blue paint in the recessed front portico reflects the use of that space by the Speed family as an outdoor summer room. The bright green paint selected for the replacement shutters was the most common shutter color used during the early nineteenth century.

At the height of the farm's productivity, there were many other buildings that were needed to tend to the lives of the family and the farm. Among these were the smokehouse, springhouse, and stone barn, which with many alterations and much rebuilding are all still standing. Other outbuildings included at least one privy, separate stables for the farm and carriage horses, a carriage house large enough for six carriages (built in 1835), barns, a schoolhouse, a weaving house, a hemp house, and slave quarters. All of these have since disappeared. There was a family graveyard on the property as well until about 1865 when the graves were moved to Cave Hill Cemetery.

The summer kitchen/cook's quarters are a recent reconstruction (1992). It was built after an extensive archaeological dig found that the foundation was exactly where it was shown on the early map. The kitchen building shows up clearly on an 1820 John Rutherford watercolor of Farmington which documents its location and brick construction. It is thought that as the

weather got warmer in the spring, cooking functions were moved out of the house and into the summer kitchen to keep the heat out of the house.

The stone and timber barn or stable in the field was rebuilt on its original foundation in 1963 and is used for storage. The blacksmith shop was built in 1961 although there is no record of there being one on the farm. The building is located on or very near the site of the historic carriage house.

The springhouse probably began as a small shelter to keep animals away from the source of the drinking water for the plantation. As the family grew, so did the springhouse. Dairy products and other fresh produce were kept cool in the flowing water. The present structure is a 1968 reconstruction utilizing the early stone that had fallen in at the present site and based on historic photographs.

At certain times of year, the spring water was dammed up to create a shallow pond near where the parking lot is located today. Ice was cut from this pond in the winter months and stored in an icehouse for year-round use. The ice house was located in front of what is now called the carriage house. The brick section of the carriage house was actually the original smokehouse which shows up clearly in the Rutherford drawing. At some point after 1934 (when it appears in a photograph as a free-standing building) a wood-frame barn was attached to it.

A limestone bridge spanned the runoff from the spring, which led to a gated split-rail fence that separated the house and yards from the agricultural fields. In gardens behind the house, a variety of vegetables and fruits grew along with an assortment of herbs. Flowers, such as larkspur, hollyhocks, and sweet william probably bordered the area. Near the gardens, outbuildings and yards closest to the main house supported domestic activities that included cooking, soap making, washing, and butchering. The buildings and fields for crops and animals stretched beyond.

History

Both John and Lucy Fry Speed came from wealthy Virginia families that moved to Kentucky in the last decades of the 1700s. John Speed's father, Captain James Speed, fought in the Revolutionary War and was badly injured. After the Revolutionary War he sought to make his fortune in land speculation in the newly opened territory west of the Appalachian Mountains. In 1782, he and his family settled near Danville, Kentucky.

In the late 1790s John Speed operated the salt works at Mann's Lick in southern Jefferson County. Many of the laborers there were enslaved African Americans whom Speed hired from other slave owners. The income derived from his successful operation of the salt works enabled Speed to purchase land on Beargrass Creek, which included the present site of Farmington, around 1809.

John Speed was married once before he married Lucy Fry. He and his first wife, Abby Lemaster, lived at Mann's Lick (now Manslick in southern Jefferson County), and had four children, two of whom died in infancy. Abby herself died shortly after the birth of her last child.

John took his two little girls, Mary and Eliza, back to Mercer County. There he met young Lucy Gilmer Fry and in November 1808 the two married. Probably the next year, John, in partnership with David Ward and William Pope, Jr., bought over 2000 acres of celebrated Jefferson County "Beargrass" land. Speed's share of that large tract was the 554 acres that made up the original Farmington property. An August, 1809 letter from John Speed to his friend and partner, William Pope, reports that "we are now living in our cabins," suggesting that by that date the family was living in log cabins on the Farmington property.

Lucy Gilmer Fry's family moved from the Charlottesville, Virginia area to Danville in 1798. Lucy's father, Joshua Fry, was a highly respected scholar, who taught at Centre College. Her maternal grandfather, the noted Kentucky explorer Dr. Thomas Walker, was one of Thomas Jefferson's guardians after Jefferson's father died. Lucy's aunt and uncle, George and Martha Divers, lived in Charlottesville in a house also called Farmington that had an addition designed by Jefferson about 1802. In addition to Mary and Eliza, the Speeds had eleven children whom they raised at Farmington.

Beginning in 1800, tax lists and census records show that John Speed owned varying numbers of enslaved African Americans. The 1810 census lists Speed as owning 10 slaves, and family information suggests that two of these persons had been owned by the Fry family and given to John and Lucy Speed. According to tax lists, John Speed owned 12 enslaved African Americans in 1811, 39 in 1812 and 43 in 1813. This rapid increase in slave ownership reflects the establishment and development of Speed's plantation at Farmington. Although the family was strongly pro-Union, slavery for most Speed family members was an accepted way of life, as it was in the community in which they lived. Slave labor was essential to the profitable operation of the plantation, just as it had been for Speed's salt works at Mann's Lick. The profits derived from the labor of enslaved African Americans at Farmington, as well as income received from hiring out slaves, helped to pay for luxury goods and education for the children in addition to family necessities. The tasks of planting, harvesting and shipping products to market were performed primarily by enslaved African Americans who worked in the fields, labored at the ropewalk and drove the wagons.

African American men and women had very different responsibilities. One of the main activities of men was harvesting hemp, which entailed cutting, hauling and pounding open the hemp stalks on a hemp break. Each man was required to break 80-100 pounds of hemp per day. James Speed stated that men who exceeded this quota were paid for their "extra work." According to Speed, women labored outside of the house milking cows and driving them to pasture and carrying heavy loads of wood and water a considerable distance to the house. Enslaved African Americans who worked in the house, primarily women, did the cooking and cleaning, lit the fires, sewed the clothes, churned butter and performed myriad other household tasks. Family letters indicate that several enslaved African Americans were "favorites" and were trusted to carry letters back and forth, sell produce in the Louisville markets, transport the children and carry out responsibilities not given to other slaves.

By the mid 1830s, hemp was the primary cash crop at Farmington and throughout the Kentucky Bluegrass region. Hemp, used to make rope and bagging, was the most labor-intensive crop

grown in nineteenth century Kentucky. By requiring a tremendous work force, it perpetuated slavery in the Commonwealth. References in the 1840 inventory and settlement papers related to John Speed's will document that Farmington had a "rope walk" and weaving house on the plantation where hemp was actually processed into rope and bagging.

Kentucky hemp farms were the nearest approach to the labor intensive, cash crop, Deep South plantations. Farmington when compared to other large Jefferson County plantations is unusual in that it is still relatively proximate to the urban core when compared to the other extant antebellum plantations including Locust Grove, Oxmoor, and especially Riverside, the Farnsley-Moremen Landing.

Although Louisville's growing resources were, to a degree, available to the Speeds, Farmington was by choice and necessity largely self-sufficient. The farm produced corn, wheat, clover, cabbages, potatoes, apples, cider, vinegar, pork, flax, lamb and mutton, and dairy products. Speed family letters indicate that there was an abundance of fruit trees, including peach, cherry, plum and apple.

Animals were also an important component of the Farmington enterprise and the enslaved tended horses, hogs, sheep, cattle, chickens and ducks. In addition to meat, animal by-products included butter, tallow for candles and soap and feathers for pillows and mattresses.

John Speed died in 1840, and change came to Farmington. James Speed became the administrator for the estate. Each Speed child received an equal share in the estate which included the division of the 57 slaves. Austin Peay, husband of Speed's daughter, Peachy, bought the house and some acreage in 1846. The property passed out of the family's hands in 1865. The Historic Homes Foundation, Inc. has owned the property since 1958.

Significance

Farmington is a highly significant Federal Style Kentucky plantation house that is associated with a number of historic themes. These include the evolution of Abraham Lincoln’s political philosophies, the influence of the prominent Speed family, the development of Kentucky’s antebellum architecture, the history of enslaved African Americans, the archaeology of antebellum Kentucky, and the development of the modern historic preservation movement in Jefferson County.

The Speed family was an important and influential family in the city of Louisville. In 1841, Farmington hosted it's most famous guest, Abraham Lincoln. He had recently broken up with Mary Todd and Lincoln came to Farmington to visit with his great friend Joshua Speed and his family. Information suggests that he stayed about three weeks with the Speed family during August and September. After rest and relaxation, Lincoln returned to Springfield and to his wooing of Mary Todd.

Lincoln wrote a famous letter to Mary Speed, eldest of the Speed daughters, following his stay with the Speeds thanking her for the family's hospitality and recounting a disturbing encounter

on board the return steamboat to St. Louis. Here he witnessed the transport down river of a group of newly sold slaves. This narrative is thought to have been Lincoln's first known written reference to the horrors of slavery.

When Lincoln was elected President of the United States, he invited Joshua to join his Cabinet as Secretary of the Treasury. Joshua, who had no political ambition, declined but suggested his brother James Speed, a successful Louisville lawyer and a professor at the University of Louisville. In December 1864, James Speed became Lincoln's Attorney General. James held that position until 1866.

Today, Farmington is one of the great extant antebellum homes in Jefferson County. Designer Paul Skidmore seems to have been influenced by the architectural work of Thomas Jefferson. With two octagonal rooms imbedded in the center of the house, Farmington's plan is very similar to one produced by Jefferson for an unidentified residence. The Jefferson connection to Farmington's design is strong though not conclusive. It is not surprising that Lucy Speed would desire a sophisticated home reflecting her Virginia roots. Her grandfather, Dr. Thomas Walker, served as Jefferson's guardian and her uncle-by-marriage George Divers, lived at another house called Farmington. His house in Charlottesville, Virginia, featured a Jefferson designed-octagonal addition and Lucy would surely have seen Diver's home during a Virginia visit in 1806. Local historian, Lynn Renau, suggests that Martha Jefferson Carr, a younger sister of Jefferson and mother-in-law of early Jefferson County, Kentucky settler, Richard Terrell, likely brought the design with her from Charlottesville when she visited Louisville in 1814.

Though interior floor plans with circular, semicircular, octagonal, and other geometric spatial configurations are hallmarks of the Federal period of American Architecture, they are not common in Kentucky. There are notable examples, however, including Lexington's Pope Villa with its rotunda plan and Farmington, the only Kentucky house with flanking octagonal rooms.

The Historic Homes Foundation was created in 1957 specifically to acquire Farmington and to open it to the public as a house museum. This commitment to historic preservation is among the earliest in the Commonwealth and arguably launched organized historic preservation activity in Jefferson County. Farmington has been listed in the National Register of Historic Places since 1972. A Kentucky historic highway marker greets visitors at the Bardstown Road entrance. Today, Farmington survives as one of Jefferson County's and the Commonwealth's most important historic homes.

Archaeological Significance

The first recorded archaeological work conducted at Farmington was a survey by Kentucky Heritage Commission (now Kentucky Heritage Council) archaeologist Frederick T. Wilson in 1975. Undertaken to facilitate restoration plans, the survey consisted of an intensive, systematic walking of the site and probes were employed where exposed features were evident (Wilson 1975). The results indicated the possible location of a cistern, recording of a foundation, location of an exposed brick feature and an artifact concentration between two extant structures.

Between 1974 and 1976, a prehistoric site was discovered near the northern end of the

Farmington property. Archaeologists conducting a Phase I survey for the expansion of the Watterson Expressway (I-264) discovered a small Archaic site of unknown size. Artifacts recovered include Kirk projectile points, longitudinal knives, hafted end scrapers, utilized flint flakes, bifaces and drills (Granger 1976:72).

In 1992, Stephen McBride and Margaret Bellhorn of the Program for Cultural Resource Assessment at the University of Kentucky conducted a limited archaeological investigation north of the main house. The purpose of the investigation was to determine the presence of any outbuildings for possible reconstruction and to determine if an area slated for an administrative building contained archaeological deposits. The project revealed the foundation of a nineteenth century building and an artifact concentration to the north of that foundation (McBride and Bellhorn 1992). Without further excavation, a brick kitchen was reconstructed on the footprint of the foundation.

In 1996, an informal project was undertaken by Anne Bader with the help of local university students. The excavations revealed a historic feature in the orchard area, containing brick, nails, ceramics and glass. Nineteenth century artifacts were found near the stone foundation to the northeast of the carriage house (Granger and Jones 1997: 12 and Bader personal communication: 2002, 2006).

In 1997 and 1998, the University of Louisville conducted archaeological field schools at Farmington (Granger and Jones 1997). At this time a new, permanent datum point was established near the current flower garden to maintain horizontal control of artifacts and features. This datum point will be utilized for all future archaeological work at Farmington. The field school discovered and excavated the remains of a nineteenth century stone foundation in the area north of the reconstructed kitchen. Little documentary evidence has been found dealing with the structure. The artifacts generally consisted of early to mid-nineteenth century domestic items; including refined and coarse ceramics, nails, window and container glass, personal items such as hat pins, buttons, and jewelry (Slider 1998). The 1998 field school continued excavation on the foundation, revealing the remainder of the hearth pad, a robber's trench on the north side, the west foundation and part of the east foundation.

Some of the personal items recovered include a pocket knife or straight razor, a blue glass bead and two coins; one is pierced and marked with an "X". The 1775 Mexican Real has been pierced and scratched with an "X" on both sides. Pierced coins were worn by both African and European cultures, as good luck charms and to ward off evil. Some archaeologists have argued that "X's" scratched on pottery or coins and even sewn into the patterns of quilts have special meaning to enslaved African Americans. The predominant arguments are that the "X" symbolizes depiction of the cosmos in a number of African religious systems, or as a cross in the Christian religion, or even as a symbol of the crossroads between slavery in the south and freedom to the north.

A number of other excavations at other Louisville plantations have recovered items marked with "x's". These plantations include Locust Grove and Riverside. At Locust Grove, two coins and a spoon were marked with an "x," and at Riverside a spoon was marked with an "x". Such "x's"

have been found and studied throughout Southern archaeological sites from Texas to South Carolina. All of these items may testify to a sense of community and identity within the African American community.

Farmington continues to have a very high potential for yielding significant archaeological resources related to the evolution of an important antebellum Kentucky hemp plantation.

Integrity Assessment
The house has been little changed since it was built though it has undergone some superficial renovations over the years. A tin roof was placed over the existing wood shingles to reduce the fire hazard. The exterior and interior have been repainted to reflect the original paint scheme of bright blue, yellow, and pink colors. Newly faux-grained doors and stippled woodwork recreate the original decorative painting found on many interior surfaces. Outbuildings include extant historic structures or reconstructions based on extensive archival or archaeological research. Overall, the home retains the qualities that supported its nomination to the National Register of Historic Places in 1972.

Boundary Justification
The property proposed for designation is located at 3033 Bardstown Road property. The property contains 14 acres of land as well as numerous buildings and is described by the Jefferson County Property Evaluation Administrator (PVA) under several parcel numbers. There are also several addresses for these properties. The main house is 3033 Bardstown Road. The visitor's center is 3029 Bardstown Road. The main house, visitor's center and driveway are located on the same parcel number of 081K-0021-0000. The rest of the outbuildings and land are located on parcel numbers 081K-0020-0000 (3000 Montrose Avenue), 081K-0050-0000 (3031 Bardstown Road), 081K-0051-0000 (3010 Montrose Avenue), 081K-0057-0000, and 081K-0058-0000. The proposed boundaries for the Farmington Individual Local Landmark designation area are represented by the black lines on the LOJIC aerial photograph that follows.

LOJIC Aerial Photograph

Sources of Information

http://www.historichomes.org/farmington

http://www.lojic.org

http://www.migration.kentucky.gov/kyhs/hmdb/MarkerSearch.aspx?mode=All

Brooks, Carolyn, *Farmington: Interpreting a Kentucky Plantation Home*.

Lancaster, Clay, *Antebellum Architecture of Kentucky*, University Press of Kentucky, 1991.

Renau, Lynn Scholl, *So Close From Home*, Herr House Press, 2007.

Stahlgren, Lori. "Previous Archaeological Research at Farmington", 2011.

Designation Criteria

In considering the designation of any neighborhood, area, Property or Structure in the Jefferson County as a Local Landmark, or District, the Commission shall apply the following criteria with respect to such Structure, Property or District:

Local Landmark Designation Criteria	Comments	Meets	Does Not Meet
(a) Its character, interest, or value as part of the development or heritage of Louisville Metro, Jefferson County, the Commonwealth, or the United States.	Farmington was a large, self sufficient, early nineteenth century hemp plantation whose history provides unique insights into the social and agricultural heritage of Louisville and Jefferson County.	**X**	
(b) Its exemplification of the historic, aesthetic, architectural, archaeological, prehistoric or historic archaeological, educational, economic, or cultural heritage of Louisville Metro, Jefferson County, the Commonwealth, or the nation.	Research at Farmington, including archaeological investigations and documentation of the lives of enslaved African Americans, continues to yield highly significant information about our community's past.	**X**	
(c) Its location as a site of a significant historic event.	Abraham Lincoln stayed at Farmington for three weeks and witnessed slavery first hand. His experience helped shape his views of slavery.	**X**	
(d) Its identification with a person or persons who significantly contributed to the culture and development of Louisville Metro, Jefferson County, the Commonwealth, or the nation.	Abraham Lincoln became the nineteenth President of the United States. His views on slavery were influenced by his stay at Farmington. The Speed family figured prominently in the nineteenth century social, cultural, economic, and political life of our city, county, state, and nation.	**X**	
(e) Its embodiment of distinguishing characteristics of an architectural type or specimen.	The house is a unique example in Kentucky of the Federal style.	**X**	
(f) Its identification as the work of an architect, landscape architect, or master builder whose individual work has influenced the development of Louisville Metro, Jefferson County, the Commonwealth, or the nation.	The house was designed by Paul Skidmore. However, elements of the design are hallmarks of the influence of Thomas Jefferson.	**X**	

(g) Its embodiment of elements or architectural design, detail, materials, or craftsmanship, which represents a significant architectural innovation.	Farmington's two octagonal rooms are unique in Kentucky. The hidden staircases are also unusual and perhaps further evidence of the Jeffersonian influence.	**X**	
(h) Its relationship to other distinctive areas, which are eligible for preservation according to a plan based on an historic, cultural, or architectural motif.	Farmington is among a handful of highly significant examples, including Locust Grove, Ridgeway, Berry Hill, and Spring Station, of Colonial or Federal architecture in Jefferson County and the State of Kentucky.	**X**	
(i) Its unique location or physical characteristics representing an established and familiar visual feature or which reinforce the physical continuity of a neighborhood, area, or place within Louisville Metro.	Farmington has been a visual landmark along Bardstown Road and especially the Watterson Expressway for decades and is one of the last remnants of antebellum agrarian land within the former city limits.	**X**	